



Weekly Wisdom

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

Starting from October 2022, Julian Foster (many times NSW representative) will be analysing an interesting hand from each Monday morning session. The City and Canada Bay venues are planning to play the same hand on Monday morning. His column is updated weekly and published on the Sydney Bridge Centre website, under "Learn Bridge".

You are also welcome to [send questions](#) about hands that you have played. Please use "Weekly Wisdom" as email subject.

Running your long suit in 3NT!

City and Canada Bay – Monday Morning 7th November 2022

Looking through the boards last week, there seemed to be a huge number of slams available. However, I'm focusing on a game hand instead. Board 9 showed the value of running a long suit even if the contract looks like it should go off.

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|----------|----------|---------|----------|
| 9 | | ♠ T2 | Dir: N |
| | | ♥ QJ432 | Vul: E-W |
| | | ♦ 92 | |
| | | ♣ K943 | |
| ♠ KJ753 | ♠ 9 | 6 | |
| ♥ AT | ♥ 975 | 16 | 9 |
| ♦ AT | ♦ KQJ753 | 9 | |
| ♣ A752 | ♣ QJT | | |
| ♠ AQ864 | | | |
| ♥ K86 | | | |
| ♦ 864 | | | |
| ♣ 86 | | | |

Looking first at the auction though it's quite likely there will be 3 passes to West although there are a few variations possible depending on bidding systems. For example:

- North might open 2♥ if it means a weak hand with hearts and a minor
- East might open 2♦ if that's a weak two
- South might, after two passes, decide to open a (very!) light 1♠ to make life harder for the opponents (although, as we'll see shortly, that will probably backfire here).

The 2♥ opening from North could work well on this hand. East isn't strong enough to overcall 3♦. South might raise to 3♥ and it's now almost impossible for East West to reach 3NT. It's easier with the other variations. Over a vulnerable weak 2♦ from East, West just probably bids 3NT. Also, if South does open 1♠, West can overcall 1NT and East will then raise to game.

If there are three passes West might open 1♠ but I think a more practical bid is 1NT. When deciding what to open you should always consider your rebid and what are the most awkward responses partner might make. Here you need to think what you will rebid if partner responds 2♦ or 2♥. 2NT would show 12-14 so you are too strong for that. 3♣ is possible but your hand is essentially balanced and the clubs aren't very good. Overall, a 1NT opening provides a better description and it avoids any rebid problems. If West does open 1NT, East should probably just bid 3NT immediately and hope his diamonds are worth lots of tricks.

Turning now to the play, most pairs were in 3NT from West. One made easily on the ♠10 lead (this is how South opening 1♠ may backfire!). Today North's normal heart lead is what causes declarer problems as his only heart stop is knocked out quickly. He will duck once (in case hearts are 6-2) but cannot hold it up any longer so the defence are left in a position to run their remaining hearts if they get in. On the face of it declarer only has 8 tricks at that point (♥A, ♣A, 6 diamonds). Some tables probably took the club finesse which fails today. But Deep Finesse says 3NT does make - why? The answer, as so often the case in no-trumps, is to just run your long suit and see what happens. North has to find 4 discards on the diamonds which he will not enjoy! What can they be? If he throws a heart now he only has 2 more heart winners left (so declarer can lead a spade towards dummy and now just loses 1 spade and 3 hearts).

North can spare 2 clubs and 1 spade but then has problems. If he discards a 3rd club declarer can drop his K. So he probably has to discard his 2nd spade. But now the defence cannot reach South's ♠A so declarer can still make it another way - see advanced section for how.

Of course this is all nice in theory. In the real world declarer can't see the opposing hands. The club finesse might be working all along so he'd look pretty stupid doing anything else then! But the big advantage of running the long suit is the defence will almost always help you (either accidentally or deliberately) with their discards or signals. Or they may give away their problems with lots of anguished squirming before making a discard!

Early in the hand a defender often needs to be honest with his signals - that's because the defence start with the big disadvantage of not being able to see each other's hand so their first priority usually needs to be to help each other rather than worry about misleading declarer. Later in the hand it's a different story.

Here it's quite likely North will encourage clubs. That might tip declarer off that the club finesse is failing and cause him to look for something else.

Key points to note

- Always consider your rebid over partner's likely responses before opening.
- In no-trumps running a long suit will frequently cause the defence insoluble problems. A good declarer can read their hands based on what they discard and how smoothly they make them!
- Signals and discards from the defence early in a hand tend to be more honest.
- If you have a choice to defer making a key decision when declaring, it's almost always right to do so as you can learn more about the hand.

More advanced

When declarer doesn't have enough tricks for his contract, he often has to choose between 3 options:

- a) committing to one line to take extra tricks which is immediately a win/lose (the club finesse here).
- b) try a deception line (perhaps trying to sneak a quick trick through before the defence know what's going on).
- c) running some tricks and hope to work out what to do later by trying to gauge the opponents' hands.

(a) is usually a bad choice. It's also premature - for example on this hand the club finesse will still work later in the hand so there's no rush to try it immediately. Much better to run diamonds and then decide later.

(b) is no good on this hand. You might consider playing a spade and hoping South ducks then you can run 9 tricks. But if the long diamonds are visible in dummy not many defenders will fall for it. Also the entries won't work here. You need to play ♦A then ♦K to reach East. Now if you lead a spade up even if South does duck you can't quickly get back to East to run your diamonds anyway! In general a deception line like this works best early in the hand (before the defence have been able to exchange many signals) and also if a threat like a long suit is concealed in hand rather than being visible in dummy.

So (c) is usually the best choice. Sometimes, however, cashing tricks can remove future entries to take finesses. In that case, you might find running the long suit then forces you to take a particular position in another suit. All that needs weighing up.

We've seen how declarer can make 3NT if North discards a heart or 3 clubs. What if he keeps ♣Kx, all his hearts and throws another spade? The answer is for declarer to play a heart himself! North is welcome to his 3 heart winners but then he will only have ♣Kx left and have to lead away from it. Of course declarer has to be pretty confident about the layout to do this though. He'd look a right idiot if North cashes 3 hearts and then produces a spade after all - with the club finesse having been working the whole time!!

This is where being able to read what the defenders do is a big part of bridge. Many Norths will encourage clubs here out of instinct. But in fact he wants declarer to take the finesse so he should probably DISCOURAGE clubs! At higher levels of the game these scenarios are very much bluff and double bluff!

Julian Foster (many times NSW representative)

Upcoming Events *(please check SBC website / What's on...)*



Sunday 27th November 2022
1.30pm – 4.30pm



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1.30pm – 4.30pm



FRI 9th / WED 14th December 2022
Bridge + Lunch, 1 session or 2 sessions